1: Meek E, G-5 (1925-1930) 1931
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794 626 582 continually, and to produce it at the spring festival tied round the pot containing her offering of beer. If she cannot produce it she is fined. If she runs off to another husband during that period, her relatives, who of course live in some other town, are fined. It might appear that the *obwai* of one town had no power of levying fines on members of another town, but as there is a reciprocal arrangement between the towns there is no difficulty in collecting the fines. The practice is not purely selfish, but is directed towards the common good, for in addition to prohibiting one's own wives from running away it also prohibits parents during this period from allowing their married daughters to contract a sub-marriage. A parent of town A who during these six months receives a bride-price from a man in town B for a married daughter who lives in town C is fined by the *obwai*.

794 796 241 The *obwai* is not, however, merely a village policeman. He is the centre of the festivals which begin and end the agricultural year. The main *obwai* festival is that which introduces farming operations just before the first rains. The whole community brings to the *obwai* hut offerings of beer, beniseed, goats, chickens, and porridge. The senior men pour the beer into the common pot in the *obwai* house, leaving a portion for the women and the younger people, who partake outside. The *Agwam obwai* then drinks a little of the beer from the pot, and asks the *obwai* to secure for them a successful farming season. A general feast ensues, the senior males being inside the *obwai* house, and the women and younger males being outside in the vicinity under a large tree. Dancing begins, and the voice of the *obwai* is heard. (He speaks, concealed in the roof, in a voice disguised by the use of a wooden tube covered with spider's egg capsule.) He breaks into a song, addressing, it would seem, his living representative the *Agwam obwai*: "Kiachang a chira" ("Have you taken aught from anyone by force?"). The *Agwam obwai* replies "E" ("No, I have not"). The *obwai* continues: "Gado ze yai kiang niâ cheda" ("No one can take aught by force—he can only give it willingly"). The *Agwam obwai* replies (singing, and all outside taking up the refrain): "Ei ee" ("Yes, that is true"). The *obwai* continues: "Lung yungwav" ("Fire has devoured the town"). Refrain: "Ei, ee." *Obwai*: "Salio bang ayawat" ("But nothing can part brethren save death only"). Refrain: "Ei, ee." *Obwai*: "A biang sang okwon" (indecent). Refrain:

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"Ei, ee." *Obwai*: "Na mi kiang a zangat se zangat (indecent). Refrain: "Ei, ee."

The indecency of the songs sung at the public festivals is in striking contrast to the rules of decorum which govern the ordinary private life. This is not characteristic of the Katab, but may be said to be general of all Negro society. To brothers-in-law, for example, any jokes about sexual intercourse would, in the ordinary course, be taboo and wholly impossible. A man will bow down in humble subjection to his parents-in-law and avoid them on all possible occasions. But on the occasion of public festivals all the ordinary rules of private life are waived, and there is a saturnalia which permits a father-in-law to dance round in the same circle as his daughter-in-law, singing songs referring in the main to sexual matters. It is repugnant to any native to repeat in cold blood the words of these songs to a European, and it would be equally repugnant to him to use them at any other time than on the occasion of the public festival when, as of old among the Romans, free expression is given to the pent-up feelings. (In this connection we may instance cases where during public festivals, e.g. among the Gwari, it is permissible to abuse the Chief without fear of retaliation for all actions during the year which were regarded as unjust and tyrannical.) An *obwai* festival is also held at harvest, and a month before the feast his voice is heard warning the people to make preparations and desist from idle disputes.

There are among the Katab no elaborate rites of initiation into the cult of *obwai*. Children are taken to his hut at an early age (4–8), warned to be obedient to their parents and given food. The short ceremony is concluded by a form of baptism in a stream, the smearing of the boys' heads with mahogany oil, and a feast in the village. It may be of interest to mention here the part that the *obwai* plays among the neighbouring Jaba tribe in the matter of initiation. These initiation rites among the Jaba have no connection with circumcision. They are performed when the lad is between 9 and 11 years of age. Among the Jaba, the *obwai* is known as the *Ku*[1] and the initiation rites are known as *woroku*. A noteworthy feature is that the lad is initiated not by his father, but by his maternal uncle. The father has no say in the matter. The lad goes to his maternal uncle's house, and the uncle provides the preliminary fee of one chicken. He

[1] This is a Jukun and apparently also an Ancient Egyptian term. See Meek, *A Sudanese Kingdom*, p. 263.

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one or more of his sons to a brother or half-brother who has no children of his own. This is considered a duty, and it is said to be good for the boy as he will be more strictly brought up by his paternal uncle than by his own father. In such cases the paternal uncle arranges the boy's marriage, and the boy is expected to look after his paternal uncle in his old age. His father has no further control over him. Occasionally a Morwa will send a son temporarily to his wife's family. But it is not the custom (as occasionally among the Hausa) to hand over a son to a friend who is not a close relative.

Clan emblems appear to be non-existent except among the Agbat, who respect the python. No one will eat leopard's flesh unless in conjunction with a protective medicine of pumpkin leaves. It is interesting to note that the skins of leopards have to be handed over to the Chawai chiefs, an indication that the Morwa are intruders into Chawai country.

The Morwa culture resembles that of the Katab. They wear the "tail" described in the Katab report, and it might have been added there that, according to Driberg, the Lango of Uganda formerly wore "a broad leathern tail covering both buttocks and studded with pieces of metal". Incidentally the same author records that unmarried girls among the Lango (and apparently also among the Bari) wear aprons of small metal chains. The Ganawuri, who are the immediate neighbours of the Morwa, have also this custom which appears to be unique in Nigeria.[1]

Religion.—As already stated the principal priestly family lives at Kisagwai near Manchok. The cult is principally animistic. A feast of All Souls is held annually, and twice a year (in October and March) the ghosts of the dead are heard crying in the sacred grove, a sign that the time has come when the rites should be performed. A bull-roarer is used to simulate the cries of the spirits, a custom which links the Morwa with the Semi-Bantu speaking groups. In the grove there is a sacred spring, and there the priest makes his offerings of beer, calling on the departed spirits to be patient and refrain from destroying the town. The lintel of the door of the priest's house at Kisagwai is decorated with a black cross. There is the same rule among the Morwa as among the Kagoro, that no one may enter a priest's hut or

[1] But it is found among the Tur of the British Cameroons.

2: Gunn E-4 (no date) 1956 FF38 Katab FF38

the same way for the death of her brother's wife, retiring to her brother's village for the prescribed period.

Religious Beliefs and Practices

Among the Katab, the "high god" is called Gwaza and, according to Meek, appears to be associated with the sky and the moon. Individuals address more or less personal prayers to Gwaza on first seeing the new moon, though it is more usual for prayers to be directed towards the ancestral spirits as intermediaries.[29] It is believed that the majority of the spirits of the dead are content to remain in their abode "Lahira" (a Moslem term), but discontented and evil spirits may return to the world to trouble men. There is no general belief in reincarnation, though the dead are believed sometimes to be reborn, especially in the case of posthumous children of men who have met an untimely death.

According to Meek, the senior male of each household offers thanks for the yearly supply of food at harvest time with the first fruits at the graves of the ancestors. The services of the high priest (*magajin elenowum*) are not ordinarily required; it seems that he is concerned primarily with placating spirits of the lineage whose identity cannot be determined, and with those believed to be troubling not lineal but collateral descendants. Some original connection between the ancestor and head-hunting cults is suggested by the fact that the *elenowum* was custodian of skull trophies.

Also associated with the ancestral cult is the public cult of the *obwai* or "tutelary genius" (Hausa, *dodo*) who seems to represent generally the plurality of ancestral spirits and particularly the spirit of the ancestor of the clan or lineage. From the Katab, specifically, Meek was unable to get what he regards as a satisfactory account of the cult and the beliefs surrounding it, "which," he concludes, "is not surprising, as the . . . cult was found in many instances to [be] an importation from neighbouring tribes or to have been derived from the Aku clan, whose *obwai* takes precedence over all the others."[30]

The cult has the appearance of a male secret society and is used largely as a means of disciplining women and children; "if a theft is committed in the village the shrill voice of the *obwai* is heard." An *agwam obwai* presides over the cult in each lineage (village). The main festival introduces farming operations just before the first rains, and the whole community brings to the *obwai* hut[31] offerings of beer, beniseed, goats, chickens and porridge. The senior men pour the beer into the common pot in the *obwai* hut, leaving some for the women and younger people, who partake outside. The *agwam* then drinks a little from the pot and asks the *obwai* to grant them a successful farming season. A general feast follows, dancing begins, and the voice of the *obwai* is heard speaking from a place of concealment in the roof. There is another festival at harvest, and the voice is heard a month before, warning the people to make preparations and to "desist from idle disputes." The *obwai* actually appears, in the form of a masked dancer, only biennially.[32]

Rain-making rites also appear to be connected with the ancestors, each lineage having its rain-maker whose rites are associated above all with a particular

[29] God and sky (*choadza*) both appear rather to be derived from *za*, rain, however; see Ikulu religious beliefs, below, p. 86.

[30] Meek's criteria of coherence of belief are not stated; it seems not impossible that the language problem, or even an understandable reticence may have lain at the root of his difficulty in obtaining a complete account of Katab beliefs.

[31] The only round hut in the village, accommodating 30–40 people and provided with mud benches.

[32] What the term "obwai" actually means to Katab, initiated or uninitiated, is not clear. From Reynolds' account of it among Kaje, it seems that members of the cult understand the term to apply primarily to the hollowed-out "seed" (pod, or "gourd"?) of *Oncoba spinosa* used to produce the spirit-voice, though the uninitiated understand "obwai" to be the name of the spirit whose voice is heard. In view of the supposed western origins of the cult it appears significant that Edgar in his Gbari dictionary enters *obwe, obwwe* as "*Cucurbita lagenaria:* a calabash, gourd." No embodiment of *obwai* appears among Kaje, but among Katab and Kagoro *obwai* may appear as a masked figure.

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site, and who addresses himself direct to the high god.[33] If the prayers for rain are successful, he retires to the grave of his most remote ancestor to offer thanks. Though there are over twenty lineages and rain-makers among the Katab, the most important is that of Shokwa, the *teowap* or *magajin dodo*.[34] Among Shokwa, whose origin out of the waters of Kaduna will be recalled, special rites are performed, which would, presumably, benefit the whole tribe, all having some connection with the Kaduna River.

The *teowap*, too, presided over the important head-hunting cult: preliminary rites were performed over the warrior and his trophy by his local *elenowum*; but on the second day, the head-winner, with the *elonowum*, retired to Shokwa, and the *teowap* there performed further rites. After *elenowum* and warrior returned from Shokwa, the latter's maternal uncle might take the head for cleaning, but it was finally deposited in the local skull-hut, in the care of the *elenowum*. A first feast was held on the warrior's return from Shokwa, when the warrior partook of a small piece of flesh from the head. which, it would seem, qualified him technically for the salutation, " *mwaliak* "; a final feast was held when the head had been prepared for display.[35] It is probably significant that the *elenowum* also functioned as the keeper of game-heads (less now than formerly, owing to the disappearance of large game in any quantity from the Katab area); it was he apparently who actually cooked and distributed the game killed.[36]

As regards totemism, Meek states that some of the Katab clans have animal or plant taboos, but that these do not appear to be closely associated with the system of clan exogamy or to play much part in binding the members of a clan together. There is no doubt considerable variation from one lineage, clan or sub-clan to another. The Agbat clan, for instance, respects the crocodile, the Shokwa clan the *tatona* lizard; children often respect the clan-emblem of their mother as well as that of their father. In addition, Agbat appears to be the only clan to perform special rites when a leopard is killed.

Kaninkon (Tum) of Jema'a District, Jema'a Emirate-Division, Plateau Province

General: Nomenclature

A link between Kaninkon and Katab is impossible to establish with absolute certainty and there is no available evidence of a close connection between them at the present time, though relations with Kagoro (and the Kachichere of Jema'a) are traditionally cordial.

[33] Significant if Gwaza is regarded as a rain god.

[34] Kuzat lineage, presumably: Kamantan lineage is an adopted immigrant group The structure of Shokwa to be deduced from this account of Meek's appears to diverge sharply from the Katab norm. In general Meek has noted that the various religious posts are filled by members of distinct " branches " of each lineage: the *teowap*, however, is apparently *agwam obwai* (as *Magajin dodo*), and rain-maker and, as rain-maker, it would seem, in light of Shokwa's miraculous origin, also in effect *elenowum*.

[35] Meek notes: " . . . The Zaria Hausa and Fulani never had sufficient control over the tribe to interfere with head-hunting. The chief enemies of the Katab were the Kaje ", that is, presumably, among the members of the Katab group: members of the group did not wage war merely for the sake of heads, but on provocation, and the Kaje, being the largest and most aggressive of the neighbours of the Katab proper, very likely gave provocation freely; there is evidence, however, that Fulani and Hausa were preyed upon with considerable enthusiasm by all members. Ultimately, peace-making between Kaje and Katab proper resolved itself into the ritual exchange of heads taken in battle.

[36] Meek's account at this point raises a number of questions: elsewhere he states that a hunter takes the head of his quarry to his mother's brother; and, again, to the " head " of Aswen (wh'ch lineage is not specified: Amurun-Alan and Yagofo lineages are recognized as biologically derived from eponymous Aswen; but the adopted immigrant Awai, on the other hand, is credited with teaching the other two the art of animal-skinning); further, if the connection between game-hunting and head-hunting is truly significant, which Meek suggests, a connection between the former and the *teowap* of Shokwa needs to be demonstrated. To some extent, these apparently contradictory statements may reflect actual variation in local practice: if so, the fact needs to be stated explicitly.